

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE COMMERCE DATA ADVISORY COUNCIL

Justification

Through the *Open for Business* agenda and the Department of Commerce's (DOC) Strategic Plan, the DOC has begun to view its own data assets from an organizational perspective. The DOC bureaus share a set of core principles related to data management. Each bureau is committed to make the DOC's economic, demographic, scientific, and environmental data easy to find, understand, and use. The DOC's bureaus want to develop partnerships with other government agencies and the private sector to improve data interoperability and dissemination—while closely safeguarding data confidentiality and integrity, personal privacy, economic security, and taxpayer dollars.

The DOC's Chief Data Officer, along with the DOC Data Service, draw on knowledge of data science, modern technology, and public policy to establish the enterprise data vision and strategy for how the Department leverages bureaus' data assets and develops collaborative practices with federal, state, local, and tribal agencies, and the private sector to deliver value to the public. The DOC Data Advisory Council (CDAC) helps ensure that outside data experts provide ongoing guidance to assist in shaping data management across the DOC.

Considering the challenges involved in making more data available – and available in more useful ways – DOC would benefit considerably from the expertise and experiences of people who have already identified and successfully addressed these challenges. Private sector businesses are making more data available and making better use of it. Several state and local governments are already much farther along than DOC in addressing similar issues. Business and non-governmental organization experts have been advising entities about pushing more data out to their customers for several years. DOC wants to take advantage of this expertise as it grapples with the issues involved.

Several barriers exist to making more DOC data available. They include incompatibility of different information technology systems, multiple data formats and structures, legal and regulatory constraints, and overcoming the general human resistance to change. Each barrier poses a considerable challenge. Together they are daunting. Obtaining advice from experts and people with actual experience in overcoming these barriers will significantly improve DOC's ability to make more data available and shorten the timeframe DOC will need to successfully achieve *Objective 4.1* in the Department's Strategic Plan "Deliver increasing amounts of DOC data to governments, businesses, and the public in formats that are easier to access and use."

Federal employees do not have the expertise or experience needed to provide advice on the issues involved. The federal government's emphasis on data is a new phenomenon. Big Data and Open Data have been percolating as concepts for a few years, but federal agencies have been slow to respond. DOC is no exception. Our federal employees are experts in their individual fields and excel in collecting, analyzing, and distributing individual data sets, using well-established methodologies and processes; however, few have experience in combining data sets

on a large scale or breaking down barriers to integrating data. While the evolution of the DOC Data Service is beginning to address this, outside experts – by virtue of not working in federal agencies – bring fresh perspectives. Moreover, the experts DOC seeks to include as members of the CDAC will include those who have actually achieved results in making diverse big data assets available to their customers.

None of the charters of existing DOC advisory committees are broad enough to encompass the specific work expected of the CDAC. The CDAC is intended to address data issues that cut across the Department, and to make DOC data easier to find, access, combine, and analyze. A review of the advisory committees currently supporting DOC's production of weather, climatic, economic, demographic, and other data revealed that none are sufficiently inclusive to address the broad issue of improving data management and dissemination across the department.

- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has nine advisory committees.¹ Each is focused on a specific scientific topic; none would be suitable for addressing DOC data as a whole.
- The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is supported by a National Construction Safety Team Advisory Committee. Its charter is focused on construction standards and investigations.²
- The Economic and Statistics Administration (ESA) is supported by the Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee. This committee is charged with advising the directors of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and the Census Bureau on “statistical methodology and other technical matters related to the collection, tabulation, and analysis of federal economic statistics.”³
- Bureau of Economic Affairs (BEA) is supported by the Bureau of Economic Analysis Advisory Committee. This committee is charged with providing advice on matters “related to the development and improvement of BEA’s national, industry, international, and regional economic accounts.”⁴
- The United States Census Bureau is supported by two committees:
 - The Scientific Advisory Committee is charged with providing advice on “census policies, research and methodology, tests, operations, communications/messaging, and other activities to ascertain needs and best practices to improve censuses, surveys, operations and programs.”⁵

¹ NOAA provides a brief description of their committees on the bureau’s website, http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/federal_advisory_committee. Individual charters for each committee can be accessed by clicking on the relevant link.

² The charter for this NIST advisory committee is found at http://www.nist.gov/el/disasterstudies/ncst/ncst_charter.cfm.

³ The Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee’s charter is found at http://www2.census.gov/adrm/fesac/2014-09-30_fesac_charter.pdf.

⁴ See 68 F.R. 48336 (Aug. 13, 2003).

⁵ The Scientific Advisory Committee’s charter is found at.

- The Census Bureau's National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations is similar to the Scientific Advisory Committee except that it specifically examines "such areas as hidden households, language barriers, students and youth, aging populations, American Indian and Alaskan Native tribal considerations, new immigrant populations, populations affected by natural disasters, highly mobile and migrant populations, complex households, poverty, race/ethnic distribution, privacy and confidentiality, rural populations and businesses, individuals and households with limited access to information and communications technologies, the dynamic nature of new businesses, minority ownership of businesses, as well as other concerns impacting Census survey design and implementation."⁶

The CDAC will provide the insight and course direction necessary to meet the opportunities and challenges associated with the growth and availability of DOC data as a whole. It will not be limited to one specific type of data or meeting the advisory needs of one particular agency within the DOC.

<http://www2.census.gov/cac/sac/sac-charter.pdf>.

⁶ The National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations' charter is found at: <http://www2.census.gov/cac/nac/nac-charter.pdf>.